

Report to Council

Report Title: 2022 Election Voting Method Recommendations

Prepared By: Fiona Hamilton, Clerk and Sarah Johnson, Jr. Deputy Clerk

Department: Clerk's

Date: February 9, 2021

Report Number: CLK2021-04 **File Number:** C11CL, C07EL

Attachments:

Recommendation:

That the Council of the Municipality of Brockton hereby receives Report Number CLK2021-04 – 2022 Election Voting Method Recommendations, prepared by Fiona Hamilton, Clerk and Sarah Johnson, Jr. Deputy Clerk and in doing so approves the inclusion of electronic methods for the 2022 Municipal and School Board Election in the Municipality of Brockton, and further directs the Clerk to prepare the necessary By-Law to come forward.

Report:

Background:

The next Municipal and School Board Election will be held on October 24, 2022.

On October 20, 2020, the Government introduced *Bill 218: Supporting Ontario's Recovery and Municipal Elections Act, 2020*. Bill 218 amended the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996, S.O. 1996, c. 32* in order to make the electoral process consistent across Municipal, Provincial and Federal elections. On November 20, 2020, Bill 218 received Royal Assent. As a result of these amendments, the nomination day was changed to the third Friday in August. This change in nomination date does put additional pressures on staff, and was highly discussed with Ontario Municipalities, including the Association of Municipal Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario (AMCTO) prior to the Bill receiving Royal Assent.

In addition to the changes in the *Municipal Elections Act, 1996*, the Municipality continues to manage the effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic, and the possible affects it may have on the 2022 Election.

Analysis:

All Bruce County Clerks have started planning for the 2022 Election. Staff have participated in an Election Vendor Forum held remotely through the City of Markham and have also had electronic meetings with Bruce County Clerks to hear presentations from vendors regarding available software and voting methods for potentially conducting the 2022 Election.

In order to secure a method for vendors that remains accessible, accountable, and adaptive while we continue to navigate the COVID-19 Pandemic; staff recommend that Council proceed in choosing a method of voting for the 2022 Election as soon as possible so arrangements can be made.

The Municipality of Brockton has used alternative voting methods, including electronic and telephone voting for the 2014, and 2018 Elections. Electronic voting has been successful for the community, offering increased accessibility, transparency, and accountability for all residents. Electronic voting is also a method used widely across Bruce County.

The Municipality has seen significant growth over the past year, including large views of Council Meeting broadcasts, and electronic interaction with staff throughout many adjusted methods of service delivery. Staff also acknowledge the challenges faced throughout the continued COVID-19 Pandemic, and are aware that the Pandemic may continue through to 2022 which could drastically affect how to plan a safe election. For example, there may be delays in the dates by which the majority of the population will be vaccinated and the impact of emerging variants of the virus is still unknown. The use of electronic and telephone voting provides assurance that a safe and effective election can be planned with as little interruption as possible if Covid-19 related challenges are still occurring throughout 2022.

In the past, Brockton has experienced challenges with electronic voting, such as when the voting period had to be extended by a day in the 2018 election because of an unauthorized bandwidth restriction, which was a serious concern. However, as a result of the highly public nature of this issue, and in response to overall global concerns surrounding cybersecurity, many of the electronic vendors have altered their services or developed additional tools to improve security and reliability. While it is clear that issues can arise, staff have received assurance that necessary process changes have been introduced and still believe that proceeding with alternative voting methods would be the most cost effective and inclusive option for the Municipality. Electronic voting serves several categories of voters including persons with disabilities, seasonal residents, business travelers, students away at school, and absentee voters in addition to our permanent residents.

In previous Elections, staff provided alternative methods for residents to vote electronically, including a Help Desk that provided individual assistance to voters via email or phone, touch screens, instructional presentations on how to vote online or by telephone, and individual assistance at voting locations. Staff have also assisted elderly residents vote at our long-term care homes in Walkerton. Since these past methods may be altered due to the pandemic, staff recommend proceeding with electronic voting in order to create a plan that would accommodate the effects of the pandemic, and incorporate additional health and safety measures such as gathering restrictions, wearing face coverings, and physical distancing.

Once the method of voting has been selected by Council, staff will collaborate with Bruce County Clerks to continue attending vendor forums, and coordinate procedures to review proposals from Vendors for the 2022 Election. In previous Elections, Bruce County Clerks attempted to coordinate the choice of vendor to secure better pricing and dedicated, locally-focused customer service/support across the County.

If electronic and telephone voting methods are not approved, the other methods would be a traditional paper ballot or vote by mail. Both of these avenues are extremely labour intensive and would involve significant additional staff time. Given the complexity of municipal election ballots (which have numerous races, various wards and differing school supports), staff would recommend the use of electronic tabulators to reduce the

potential for error and to ensure results were available in a timely fashion. The cost of the electronic tabulators, potential return envelopes, and the additional staff/volunteer time do not represent cost-savings over the electronic methods described above.

Sustainability Checklist:

What aspect of the Brockton Sustainable Strategic Plan does the content/recommendations in this report help advance?

- | | |
|---|-----|
| • Do the recommendations help move the Municipality closer to its Vision? | Yes |
| • Do the recommendations contribute to achieving Cultural Vibrancy? | N/A |
| • Do the recommendations contribute to achieving Economic Prosperity? | N/A |
| • Do the recommendations contribute to Environmental Integrity? | Yes |
| • Do the recommendations contribute to the Social Equity? | Yes |

Financial Impacts/Source of Funding:

- Do the recommendations represent a sound financial investment from a sustainability perspective? Yes

Staff will bring forward additional reports recommending a particular vendor should Council approve moving forward with electronic and telephone voting as the alternate voting methods for the 2022 Election.

Reviewed By:



Trish Serratore, Chief Financial Officer

Respectfully Submitted by:



Fiona Hamilton, Clerk



Sarah Johnson, Jr. Deputy Clerk

Reviewed By:



Sonya Watson, Chief Administrative Officer